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"Souls already Risen with Christ"

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SERMONS BY JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

The Five Points of Calvinism and the Five Points of the New Theology.

The Sin against the Holy Ghost.

The Introduction to the Gospel of John.

Christ and his Antichrists.

Old and New Ideas concerning the Divinity of Jesus.

Is Probation or Education the End of Life?

The Sabbath — Sunday — or the Lord's Day — which?

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The True Coming of Christ.

Agnosticism *versus* Positivism.

The Hercules and Wagoner of To-day; or, State Help *versus* Self-help.

Discussions concerning Conscience and its Development.

The Scientific Basis of Prayer.

The Meaning and Value of the Lord's Supper at this Time.

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"Souls already risen with Christ."

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Why should we go to Church?

Any one who wishes for reading of this kind is invited to write to Miss L. FREEMAN CLARKE, 91 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, Mass.

"SOULS ALREADY RISEN WITH CHRIST."

"If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." — COL. iii.: 1.

THE festival of Easter is the oldest of the festivals of the Church, and also the chief festival. Long before any one thought of keeping Christmas, Christians kept with joy the festival of the resurrection. A famous Christian historian in the fourth century, Eusebius, tells us that in the year 159 Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, went to Rome to induce the Bishop of Rome to have the same day for Easter as that of the Eastern Church. This shows that not much more than a hundred years after the death of Jesus his resurrection was celebrated in the Eastern and Western Churches, one keeping it on the day of the month when it occurred, the other on the day of the week. It was an unimportant but a fortunate dispute, for it enables us to know that Easter was already widely kept as a feast of the resurrection in the middle of the second century.

There is no doubt that to the early Christians the resurrection of Jesus was the great historical fact of Christianity. Paul himself, who gives us an ideal and spiritual Christ, surprises us by saying that, unless Christ is risen, all Christian preaching and belief are vain; for all rest on that fact, all revolve around it. The celebration of Easter

Sunday has been during nearly eighteen centuries a perpetual declaration by the whole Church of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. It has been a day of joy, of triumph, of hope; it has given mankind confidence in a future life; it has swallowed up the horror of the crucifixion, and surrounded the cross with a halo of glory. It has abolished death, fulfilling the prediction of Jesus, "If a man keep my sayings, *he shall not see death.*" Christians have often ceased to notice that there is such a thing as death. But, more than this, it has given the world confidence in the power of Jesus to save the soul, to forgive sin, to purify from all unrighteousness. It has given us faith in a spiritual life which shall never know spiritual death, in the certain moral triumph of good over evil. This is the one point where the soul and body of the Christian religion are bound together in a union which cannot be dissolved. Here a physical fact and an ideal truth meet together: here spiritual religion and historic experience kiss each other. An event which happened outwardly on this earth about eighteen hundred and fifty years ago is indissolubly connected with the moral and religious life of the world.

This contradicts, as we know, many prevailing opinions. It is thought by many that there can be no essential connection between outward history and inward truth. "We believe truth because it is true," say many, "not because it is taught by one person or another. Truth is no more true because Jesus taught it than because Confucius taught it. Suppose it had been Judas Iscariot, and not Jesus, who had said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' would it have been any less true than it is now?"

Now, we must certainly admit all this. A truth is not less true because a bad man says it, nor more true be-

cause a good man declares it. It is not more true, but it may be a great deal more effective. If we were pure intellect, it might make no difference. When it is a purely intellectual question, it now makes no difference. We accept or reject a statement in mathematics without regard to the character of the man who proposes it. We look only at the calculation itself. But it is different with moral questions,— with questions of religion, freedom, honor, justice, love. When Whitefield preached in this country, twenty thousand persons once listened to him on Boston Common. In England he preached once to sixty thousand persons, and great results followed. Multitudes were converted to faith in God, and to the purpose of leading a good life, by his sermons. These sermons were printed, and they were as commonplace as possible. Reading them would hardly ever convert a single soul. What he said, however, was just as true in the book as it was in the sermon; but it did not *seem* as true. The reason is that no man *is* a pure intellect; but in every man intellect is intimately joined with heart, imagination, sympathy. Dr. Franklin came very near being pure intellect; but, when he heard Whitefield preach, he was moved to do what he had deliberately determined, for good reasons, not to do. He was lifted by the contagion of the preacher into a higher region, where he saw the importance of what his cool intellect never had been able to see. Man does not live by bread only, nor does he believe by reason only, nor perceive only by his senses. He lives by every word which proceedeth from the mouth of God,— by reason and sympathy, intellect and love, by intuition, sentiment, aspiration, faith. Now, the man who is himself filled with these qualities in a high degree has

power to rouse them in others. The truly eloquent man is one who speaks out of a full heart and soul. He whose soul is most alive can move others the most. He moves them, not by his words only, but by his whole character and being. A great soul, embodied not in words, but in a great life, in noble actions, in truths borne witness to by suffering and deeds,— he stamps truth on the souls of mankind with an indelible impression. Words are cheap: it is not difficult to say fine things. But, when great thoughts come from a living soul, equally great, all men feel their power. Thus it is the life of Jesus and the grandeur of his soul which can alone explain the immense impression which his teaching has made on the world.

Now, we find that the resurrection of Jesus was the fact that seemed to the disciples of Jesus of supreme value, as the highest manifestation of his divine life. Paul, who mentions no other miracle of Jesus, dwells on this as of essential importance. He says that Christ was "declared to be the son of God, with power, by the resurrection from the dead." He constantly speaks of the "power of his resurrection." "If Christ be not risen," he says, "your faith is vain: you are yet in your sins."

Why is such great importance ascribed to this one event? Why were the apostles chosen, not so much to be witnesses to the other events in the life of Christ as to be the witnesses to his resurrection?

The answer is that this great fact gave the disciples of Jesus a faith, courage, power, joy, which they could obtain from nothing else. They had seen their Master die in cruel tortures on the cross, conquered by the hatred of his foes. Malice had done its worst. All hope was at an end. At once they found him at their side, again alive.

He had not gone down into some dark Hades: he had gone up to be with God, his Father and their Father. He had gone up, but had not gone away. He would be with them always, even to the end of the age. All power was given to him in heaven and earth. They were to go and teach all nations his truth, and his power would go with them. They felt him nearer to them than ever before. They speak of sitting with him in heavenly places while still in this world. They had already risen with him, for this sublime faith in his presence and power lifted them into a different atmosphere of faith and love. Therefore, Paul says to them in one text, "If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above." As Jesus was living above in heaven with God, and yet was with them in all their work here, so they were also living in heaven with him while doing that work below. Thus the resurrection was not a past event, not a single miracle, like the raising of Lazarus, but a continued miracle, a constant supernatural presence going with them everywhere. It was a life of faith and love, forever flowing from the heavenly world into their hearts and lives. It was not a break in the order of things, again to be repaired, but an opening out of the higher world, through which a steady influx of spiritual life came down to the hearts of all believers, abolishing death and bringing life and immortality to light.

So, when the apostles speak of the resurrection of Christ, they are not speaking of a miracle which happened long ago, but of what was happening then; not a past portent, but the presence of heavenly power and love going with them always. That Christ rose from the dead was not a miracle in the sense of a violation in the laws of nature.

On the contrary, it was the revelation of a hitherto undiscovered natural and universal law. As Jesus rose, so should all rise? It was a revealed law that as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Adam represents the earthly part, which alone dies; Christ, the spiritual part, which lives on, untouched by death. The resurrection of Christ was therefore no mere wonder, but a revelation that death is nothing to the soul,— only a step in its upward progress.

The only exceptional fact in the resurrection of Jesus was that he was able to appear to his disciples, and thus to show them the truth of his immortality and theirs. But why should it be thought impossible or incredible that God, in the order of his providence, which causes all the dead to rise, should allow it to be sometimes seen and known that they rise. If this were ever to be permitted, it would be in the case of Jesus. One so full of divine life, having this great work to do of saving all mankind from woe and sin, and of lifting all into communion with God, might well have the power to break through the thin partition which divides the world of spirit from the world of sense, and to make himself visible to those he loved, to give them strength for their work. It is evident that he felt in himself this power, even before he died; he spoke of rising on the third day; he said he had power to lay down his life and take it again, that he was himself the resurrection and the life. He was so filled with divine inspiration that he saw beforehand that he should rise up when he seemed to go down, and that death could have no dominion over him.

We to-day, dear friends, enter into this region of faith. We also are risen with Christ. We sit in heavenly places

with him. For heaven is not a place far off, above the skies, somewhere outside of the orbit of Saturn and Neptune; but it is a world of spiritual life all around us. Christ has abolished death to all who believe in him. Those who believe in him do not die: they go on, they go in, they go up.

While the disciples at Emmaus were talking with their Master, their eyes were opened and they knew him. While we talk with Jesus on this Easter Sunday, our eyes are opened and we know him. He is our Friend,—the Friend of every soul that needs him. He is the Friend of every poor, sinful, broken heart that thinks it has no friend on earth. He is the Friend of all who wish to have his help. The true Christ is not in the past, he is here. He is not dead and gone. Behold! he is alive forevermore. He has not come merely to give us a right to be with him in some future heaven. He has brought heaven down to us here. He is with us always, even to the end of the world.

The power of the resurrection is in this, that it abolishes death. It teaches us that death is really nothing. What we call death is a step on and up. It is a step upward to all, even to the worst man, to the most impenitent sinner. Resurrection strictly means ascent. Translated rightly, it is surrection, or going up. They who have done good go up to the resurrection of life; they who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. The good go up to receive more life: the bad go up to see themselves as they are, to be freed from self-deception, to know their folly and sin, to learn that evil is always misery, and good always content. There is keen suffering, no doubt, when the bad man, who has deceived

himself in this world, sees himself as he is. But that suffering is good for him; he has gone up to receive it; he is higher than he was before. God's hell as well as God's heaven is above us, not below us. We go up to it, not down.

Since God gives death to all his creatures to whom he gives life, death must be as necessary a good as life. Death is a universal gift of God. Every creature that lives must die. Therefore, death is no punishment, no evil, but a part of the universal plan and law of progress.

Last week I went to the funeral of one of this church who has belonged to it since she was a child. When I first knew her, she was working to support an aged mother, and full of a sweet and humble loyalty to truth and good which never forsook her. Afterward she was in the Temporary Home for Children, teaching and taking care of these little ones, and full of tender love for their needs and for them. Her simple piety, her unaffected goodness, drew all hearts to her. She was the friend of the friendless, of the poor, of the forlorn, of the sinful. When she knew she was to die, she spoke such tender and hopeful words to all around her that, though most of them were of a different church and creed, they all felt the presence of one to whom Jesus had said, "There is no real death to the soul." A great grief came over the whole community when she went away; and they said to me,—as people so often say,—"Why was such a useful person taken, one we needed so much, when so many useless ones are left?" And all I could answer was that those whom we need most here are, perhaps, those who are needed most there. Why should one who is thoroughly fitted for a higher state and higher duties remain to do lower ones in this world?

And I attended another funeral this week of a poor sufferer who had borne sickness and infirmity during long years so patiently that disease was conquered and pain ceased to be an evil, and suffering was put under her feet. Love took the sting out of sorrow, and therefore out of death. Such as these do not die: they go forward and upward. Nor do they go away: they remain to help us and cheer us here below.

Let us realize our immortality this Easter morning. Let us know that there stretches before us an endless life, — not a few years only in which to think out the truth, and work for the good, and then all over, but time enough for all thought, all work, all hope, all love. How narrow and puny is the life of him who does not believe in a hereafter! How little he ventures to undertake; how worthless seems all he can do, if it is to end to-morrow, and no more! But to us, believing in an endless, upward tendency of life, in a ceaseless advance toward the infinite truth and love, there is perpetual incentive to progress.

Resurrection is going up, not down, at death. We go up according to the amount of life in us. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, because, being so full of life himself, he opens our souls to receive life and love from God. He vitalizes us, and so lifts us up. Immortality is a thing of degrees. It is the conscious existence and progress of the will devoted to what is right and good. Still more full of immortality is the soul which trusts in the infinite care of God, trusts in him as a Father, commits itself to him as a faithful Creator, and reposes in his perfect love. In such a soul there is a fulness of life which is itself immortality.

Immortality is the sense of life, the sense of a full ex-

istence, coming always from God. Conscious that God lives in it, and that it lives and moves and has its being in him, it has no dread of death. Death has no dominion over it. The only death is the fear of death,— the want of faith in things unseen, the low desire which clings only to what perishes.

The Latin nations call this day by a name derived from the Passover. It looks to our deliverance from death and the rescue from the grave. But the Teutonic nations give it a name derived from the other view,— of the coming of a new life. It is Easter, or rising up: it means the spring, when all nature arises, renewed by a perpetual miracle. The coming of new life every spring seems always a miracle, but it is only the operation of a continued law. So our rising out of death seems a miracle, but it also comes by a divine law. When the little buds, carefully packed up in numerous envelopes, defying frost, begin to swell, and to shake out their tiny leaves into the soft air, it seems like a miracle; but it is a law. When the dry seeds in the ground thrust down their tender rootlets and push up their soft stalks, and presently change the brown earth to gentle green, it also seems a miracle; but it is the divine life working by a divine law in nature. When you or I seem to go down into death, but really pass up into fuller life, that also will seem a miracle; but it will be the power of God working according to universal order to fill us with himself.

Therefore, on this Easter Sunday morning, while its sun shines so brightly around us, let us all thank God and take courage. Let us not look backward, but forward; not downward, but upward; not be desponding, but hopeful. Are there any of us here who feel lonely,

bereaved, desolate? Behold! the heavens are opened and an innumerable company of friends are waiting for you to welcome you when you go up, and lead you to him who liveth and was dead, and is alive forevermore. Are there any of us who are hesitating to do what we know to be right, not ready yet to do our duty, still postponing till to-morrow what we ought to do to-day? Let us on this bright Easter morning begin to do our work in full faith that God will enable us to accomplish it in this or in some other world. O weary heart, arise, and be strong! Sad soul, be glad to-day; for Christ has arisen! Sinful soul, turn to God and forsake your sins, and be made alive! Take part in the better resurrection, which lifts out of evil into good. Make this day the beginning of a new life, which shall never know any end, but shine brighter to the perfect day.

If we, then, be risen with Christ, let us seek those things that are above. Our sense of immortal life will deepen as we devote ourselves to all things generous, humane, true, and good. This is the true way to keep Easter,— to rise out of all that is poor, mean, cowardly, into courage and faith. Let us give ourselves, souls and bodies, to God, and be sure that all things will work for good to those who love him.